Rules of the Game
Reading Spell Descriptions (Part Five)
By Skip Williams

You must aim a spell somewhere before it can affect anything.

Target or Targets, Effect, or Area

The next entry in the spell header explains how you aim the spell, as follows:

- Target or Targets: You select one or more recipients to receive the spell. All your targets must be in range and you must have line of effect to them. If you don't have line of sight to a recipient, you still can select it as a target if you can touch it.

Often, the entry will limit the kinds of targets you can select. For example, living creatures, objects, or willing creatures. A creature is anything that has both a Wisdom and a Charisma score. A living creature also has a Constitution score.

An object is anything that lacks a Wisdom and a Charisma score, even if it is actually alive. (A rose bush, for example, is alive, but it's an object insofar as the **D&D** rules are concerned.)

A willing creature must declare itself willing, which it can do anytime, even during someone else's turn or when flat-footed. Declaring oneself willing is not an action. Likewise, you can declare yourself unwilling anytime. Unconscious creatures are automatically willing. Helpless, but conscious creatures (such as paralyzed creatures) still can declare themselves willing or unwilling.

Sometimes, you can choose targets only within some sort of limited area. The rules usually use one of two different kinds of wording to indicate that. For example, the targets entry for the *animal growth* spell is as follows: "Up to one animal (Gargantuan or smaller) per two levels, no two of which can be more than 30 ft. apart."And the targets entry for the *animal shapes* spell is as follows: "Up to one willing creature per level, all within 30 ft. of each other." Usually, when the rules say things in different ways, they mean different things, but not in this case. All the targets you choose must be with the specified distance of all the other targets, and any target that is more than the specified distance from even one other target can't be selected as a target. To put it another way, imagine a sphere with a diameter (not radius) equal to the specified distance. All the targets you choose must fit within that sphere.

When the targets entry specifies a number of targets based on level (as both the previous examples do), that refers to your caster level (see Part One).

- Effect: The spell produces something by either creating it on the spot or by summoning it from somewhere else. When an effect spell summons a creature, the spell's range determines how far away from you the creature can appear. Once it appears, however, the creature is free to move around as it likes or as you direct; the spell range no longer limits it. The same goes for summoned objects; though

most objects can't move around on their own, someone could hurl the object or carry it off.

Wall Spells: Spells such as *wall of fire* are effect spells that create barriers. Often, the effect entry for such a spell does not mention how thick the barrier is (for example, *blade barrier, wall of fire,* and *wall of force*). In these cases, the wall is basically two-dimensional, with only a negligible thickness. If such a spell deals damage (or has some other effect), the spell deals damage to anything that passes through it or otherwise breaks the plane of the barrier. In the case of a *wall of force,* nothing can break the plane (save for a few magical effects specified in the spell description).

- Area: The spell (usually) fills some volume of space as specified in the entry. As noted earlier, a spell's area cannot extend beyond the spell's range. Most spells have immobile areas, so you cannot move after casting the spell and make the area extend farther or shift around. (If a spell's effects are mobile, it usually will have an effect entry instead of an area entry.) As noted in Part Two, most figment spells have fixed areas. The images you create as part of a figment can move around, but only within the spell's area.

When you aim an area spell, you must choose a point of origin (see Part One) for the spell. You must have line of effect to the point of origin you choose. If you cannot see the point of origin, you must specify the point of origin in some meaningful way. The best way to do so is select a distance and a direction from yourself or from another point of reference that you can see or touch (or that your DM agrees is well known to you). The point of origin for any area spell always must be an intersection of squares on the grid you use to regulate combat. This rule greatly simplifies the task of deciding exactly where the area extends. Once you choose the point of origin, the spell's area extends from there. The most common area shapes include the following:

Burst or Emanation: The area extends from the point of origin in a sphere whose radius is specified in the entry (though some bursts are cone-shaped areas). Anything that blocks line of effect from the point of origin also blocks the burst or emanation.

If a burst or emanation spell is aimed into a location that's too small to hold the entire sphere (or cone), the spell still works, but its area will be only as large as the space allows.

A caster can aim a burst or emanation spell at a location where only part of its area is blocked. In this case, the unblocked portion of the spell's area will be its normal size, and the blocked portion extends only as far as the obstacle that blocks line of effect from the spell's point of origin.

Spread: A spread is similar to a burst, except that it can turn corners. When line of effect from the point of origin is blocked, just go around the obstacle, tracing a path that's as long as the spread's radius.

The rules don't tell you what to do when whatever blocks the spread's line of effect isn't a solid object (for example, an *antimagic field*). In this case, just the treat the *antimagic field* like a solid obstacle. A spell with a spread area and the sonic descriptor will spread around a *silence* spell.

Cone: A cone is a quarter circle that extends from the caster's space for the distance stated in the entry. If the caster's space fills only one square, the cone can start at any corner of the space (that corner is the spell's point of origin). The rules are silent about what to do when the caster's space fills more than one square. I recommend you pick any grid intersection on the outer edge of the space as the point of origin for the spell. Alternatively, you can require the caster to choose a corner of his space as the point of origin.

Anything that blocks line of effect from the point of origin blocks the cone, and a cone can be only partly blocked,

as noted above.

Cylinder: A cylindrical area is something like a spread. The area extends from the point of origin in a horizontal circle, and then extends downward. The rules say a cylinder ignores obstructions in its area, which isn't too helpful. In effect, this means that line of effect for a cylinder isn't blocked so long as you can trace an unbroken line from the point of origin without leaving the confines of the cylinder. (You still need line of effect from you to spell's point of origin, however.)

Line: A line's point of origin is one corner of the caster's space. (If the caster's space fills more than one square, you can use the optional rule suggested for cones to select the point of origin.) The line extends from the point of origin in any direction the caster chooses and reaches as far as the spell's range (or until its line of effect is blocked). The rules regarding lines are somewhat muddled; however, a line affects anything in a square that the line passes though or touches. So, if you send a line straight down a gridline, it will affect the squares to either side of the line. Some people like to limit a line's effects to a width of 5 feet. If so, the caster chooses which side of the line gets affected when a line passes between two squares. (Choose a side when you aim the spell, and once you choose, you have to stick with that side.)

If you have to deal with a line aimed into the air, it's easiest to assume that a line affects anything in a 5-foot cube that the line passes through or touches.

Creatures or Objects: These spells work like targeted spells. They affect their subjects directly rather than filling a volume of space, but all the subjects must fit into the area specified in the entry.

*Cubes:*These areas specify a number of cubes. Usually the caster can arrange the cubes any way she likes, and this is indicated by (S) after the entry. The rules are silent on exactly how you can arrange the cubes. At the minimum, however, the cubes all must touch each other (that is share a corner, edge, or side with at least one other cube). No cube can extend farther from you than the spell's range, and you must be able to trace line of effect from at least one point in a cube back to the spell's point of origin through the other cubes in the area. The rules say a cube can't have a dimension smaller than 10 feet. Technically, that means you can't cast a spell with a cubical area in any location with a dimension smaller than 10 feet. If that seems harsh to you (it does to me), assume that a cube must have a dimension of at least 10 feet if space allows. The absolute minimum dimension for a cube in a restricted space is 1 foot -- barriers with openings smaller than that block line of effect, as noted in Part One.

What's Next?

Next week, we'll complete our tour of the spell header.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and has just completed an18-year run as the Sage of ***Dragon*** *Magazine*. Skip is a codesigner of the **D&D** 3rd edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden. (Rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends.)

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